

## **Class, gender and conflict among Belgian refugee workers in Twickenham-Richmond.**

(Now titled:

**The First World War Belgian Refugee Community of Twickenham-Richmond:  
“The Belgian Village on the Thames”)**

**Proposed joint presentation: Dr. Helen Baker, East Twickenham Centennial Group,  
and Dr Christophe Declercq, Centre for Translation Studies, University College London**

The Twickenham-Richmond Belgian community was one of the largest in the UK, centred around the Pelabon Munitions Factory in East Twickenham. The density and diversity of its Belgian population gave it a cohesion and vitality which, while not unknown elsewhere, was more intense than in most other locations. Belgians lived in parallel alongside the English community but made so great an impact that the townscape was changed, with rows of visibly Belgian shops in the streets. To the Belgians, Twickenham-Richmond became “The Belgian Village on the Thames”.

A 20 minute talk illustrated with contemporary photographs on Powerpoint will explore how divisions of class, gender and nationality were expressed in Twickenham-Richmond on an individual and group basis. It will discuss the scale of the contribution made by female factory workers in comparison with that of English women and of Belgian women in other locations. It will look at the place of trade unionism within the factory, and the quality of worker-management relations compared with elsewhere. It will consider the degree of social disorder arising from Belgian criminality and compare this with crime levels among the English. It will evaluate the nature of Belgians’ relations with the home community, asking why inter-community relations were relatively trouble-free in this area but looking too at such social tensions which occurred. Explanations will be suggested by comparing the Twickenham-Richmond situation with others such as Fulham.

This proposed presentation lies within the conference theme **Life on the Home Front**. It fits the topic area **alien, prisoner and refugee life** and refers to other suggested topics of **Workers rights / trade unionism, female factory work, disorder, and registration cards (Belgian refugees)**.